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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, we’re finally starting to see some real good signs of spring weather. After this past winter, it couldn’t come fast enough! It’s so nice to be able to go outside with being bundled up with layers of heavy clothing; and I’m looking forward to getting out in the yard in a pair of shorts and a teeshirt!

I know that last week I promised to have some words of wisdom this week with regard to a couple of articles in last week’s issue that pertained to electronic issues and the environment. Well, frankly, I barely have enough energy to put this week’s issue together and out at our usual deadline. Hectic schedule, two jobs, and not much sleep - that will kill most creativity every time! I hope that I’ll be able to put some comments "on paper" for next week, honest! Plus, I know that Joe will have some deep thoughts to express this week after a slow week in the UseNet!

Until next time...

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TeraDesk 4.01 Released

Version 4.01 of TeraDesk open-source desktop for the 16-bit and 32-bit lines of Atari computers is available at:

http://solair.eunet.rs/~vdjole/teradesk.htm

Please note the new location; domain name has been changed because of recent political changes :(

The old URL should probably still be available for a while as:

http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/teradesk.htm

This release fixes some problems that were detected when copying files to network file systems (’access denied’ error was encountered when trying to set destination file attributes and user rights). This seems to work correctly in most cases now except with some (not all) nfs when user-id-mapping is set. See the history file for details.

Also, an improvement has been made in the shutdown procedure. Probably because of ambiguous documentation, different AESes use different parameters (wiscr vs. wisgr) in shel_write() to activate shutdown! TeraDesk now tries better to account for these differences by setting all of the alternative parameters. Btw. it seems that this issue is very poorly documented and that none of the AESes implements the shutdown procedure completely and as it probably was designed to be (e.g. what about 'shutdown completed' message?)

Have fun.

Djordje

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and it's time to look at what's available on the UseNet... oops. Not much. In the past week there have been exactly TWO messages. Yep, that's right.. two.

So I'm going to take the opportunity to talk politics for a bit. I know, I know, you're tired of everyone talking about politics. But that's just what the bad guys want. They figure if you get tired of politics and stop paying attention to what's going on, they can pretty much do whatever they want to. Don't let them get away with it!

The big news this week is about torture and going after the people who ok'd it. I'm all for that. If we allow it under any circumstance, we'll end up allowing it for EVERY circumstance.

It looks to me like the higher-ups knew right from the start that most of the people the were holding had nothing to do with al-Qaeda. Unless they wanted to be tried for war crimes at a minimum, they had to find a way to make it look like these people were a threat (despite the fact that the only study the U.S. military had ever done estimated that less than eight percent of the detainees in our custody had anything at all to do with any type of terrorism, let alone al-Qaeda.

So what to do, what to do? For centuries, perhaps millennia, people have known that torture doesn't 'work'. And by 'work', I mean that it does not provide reliable information. While we know that torture isn't an effective means of extracting factual information, every once in a while, some tin-plated despot comes along and tells us that he's got a new twist that will work, and that we're justified in using it. And, sadly, the human race falls for it every time. Rome, Nazi Germany, Japan, Vietnam, China... they've all used torture and enhanced interrogation techniques... not to get useful information, but to bolster their own twisted view of things and to further their own ends. But that wasn't important; we had already gotten useful information from the few detainees that might have had any. After a certain amount of time, these people wouldn't have anything of value left... if they ever had. They'd been in detention for so long that nothing the knew would be

current. And the vast majority of them never knew anything at all.

The foiling of that plot in California that they say was made possible by their spiffy new interrogation techniques?.. Sorry. The plot was foiled in 2002 and "Enhanced Interrogation" didn't begin, judging by the recently released memos, until 2003.

So what do we do with these people?.. People who's own countries didn't want them back for fear that, if they weren't terrorists before they were apprehended, they would have BECOME terrorists during their detention.

Torture seemed to fit the bill... just use these "enhanced interrogation techniques" on them until they told you what you wanted to hear, regardless of the truth, and hold that up as proof that you had done the right thing.

The problem is that these techniques are illegal, both under U.S. law and international agreement (Geneva Convention). The answer is simple: call it something different. Remember when George H.W. Bush said, "Read my lips: No new taxes!" and then immediately after his inauguration began considering "revenue enhancements"? Yep. Just change the name of something and you can get away with it! Oh, you might need lawyers and your superiors to say that, while we don't torture, we aren't opposed to doing whatever's necessary to prove ourselves right, but that hadn't been a problem with the White House resident at the time, or his 'team', so what the heck.

The logical convolution became: "Of course we don't torture! So if we DO it, it CAN'T be torture!"

Now, in hindsight, we see that the things that were done, whether you believe them to be torture or not, just weren't right. They were things that just aren't worthy of us. Of course, some people now say that we DID get information from detainees that had been subjected to these enhanced interrogation techniques, and that makes it alright.

Of course we got info from them! But was it any good? Was it FACTUAL? Or were they simply guided to say what their interrogators wanted to hear? The Vietnamese were able to get U.S. soldiers to denounce their country and tell tales of atrocities that had never happened. They got them to embrace Vietnam and communism and anything else the sadistic bastards decided they wanted to 'put out there'. By those guidelines, torture was a success. As far as learning anything about military strategy or troop movements it was, as it always is and always will be, a failure. No matter the intention or results, it's beneath us.

Now... now that the facts are coming out, conservatives are saying that the whole thing is a tempest in a teacup, since we are the United States and should be able to do what ever we have to protect ourselves and, anyway, that's not torture.

Well, with the current rage over "Reality TV", I think it's time for a game particular game show... one with anyone who debates whether these things are or aren't torture. It would go something like this...

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to everyone's favorite game show: Is... This... Torture"

"Our contestants tonight are Ohio Senator John Boehner and Minnesota

Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann... let’s play our game!"

"Senator Boehner, you’re up first! You challenge is the ’Forced-Position Naked Pyramid’. Your position is right below former Idaho senator Larry Craig. Senator Boehner... Is... This... Torture?!?"

"Congresswoman Bachmann, your challenge is the stripped-naked kneeling, pinioned to a wall in front of a snarling attack dog on one side and Senator David Vitter on the other, after 8 days of sleep deprivation. Congresswoman Bachmann... Is... This... Torture?!?"

"Ohhhhhh! Only on THIS show, ladies and gentlemen! We have a tie! It’s time for our sudden-death lightning round... and we use real lightning!"

"Our studio audience is voting right at this very moment to decide what the challenge will be. Will it be the 90 decibel blaring noise? Will it be hanging upside down? Only time will tell, ladies and gentlemen! And the audience has chosen..."

"Dueling Waterboards and a night of restraint with cold temperatures and no clothing! Unfortunately we’re out of time, ladies and gentlemen! Tune in again tomorrow night and see which of our contestants can answer the question..."

"Is... This... Torture?!?"

Ya think it’s a little ’over-the-top’? Really? Ask the 16 year old boy that’d been in detention without recourse or representation for three years.

Think about it for a couple of days. And while you do, keep your ears open so you’ll hear what they’re saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TAKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Videogamers Show Signs of Addictive Behavior!

"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Nintendo’s Game Boy Turns 20!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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Nintendo’s Game Boy Turns 20

Twenty years ago Japan’s Nintendo Co. launched the Game Boy, the iconic handheld video game player that spawned characters from Super Mario to Pokemon and sold 200 million units worldwide.

When the Game Boy was first launched this week in 1989, Japan was enjoying its economic "bubble years," Madonna’s "Like a Prayer" topped international charts, and Chinese students were just starting to mass on Tiananmen Square.

Video games had recently moved from the arcades into family homes. In Japan children were playing Nintendo’s Family Computer or "Famicom" games on their television sets, and simple handheld games called Game and Watch.

But the Game Boy - sold at 8,000 yen (80 dollars at today’s exchange rate) - was the first portable console with changeable game cartridges and marketed as "35 hours of games in your pocket with just four batteries."

"Children were so happy they could play on the train after school and before the inevitable evening crash courses," recalled Hirokazu Hamamura, head of Enterbrain, a publishing company on the gaming industry.

"If Nintendo beat its rivals in this field, it’s because the company has spent decades in the universe of social gaming," he said.

Kyoto-based Nintendo started off in 1889 as a maker of card games and moved into toys in the early 1900s. In 1983, it launched the hit Famicom, called the Nintendo Entertainment System in the United States.

Nintendo "understood the young public, which was not the case for electronic groups like Sony, which targeted adults," said Hamamura.

Sony came up with the Walkman in 1979 but only launched a hand-held game console, the PlayStation Portable, years after the Game Boy.

The Game Boy - first associated with games ranging from Tetris to the endless adventures of Pikachu and its Pocket Monsters friends -- has since then kicked off a revolution in gaming software.

"Video games played on television essentially revolved around fight games or a game between two players or against the console," said Hamamura.

"But with the Game Boy and Tetris, the types of missions began to evolve," leading to more diverse and sophisticated games such as Pokemon, he said.

Consoles of the Game Boy series - which includes the pocket, lite and colour versions - have since sold 118 million units, while the follow-up Game Boy Advance series sold 82 million consoles.

Twenty years on, Nintendo’s portable consoles have grown up with their users. Nintendo in 2004 launched the dual-screen or DS portable console, which has since sold more than 100 million units around the world.

It boasts games such as the popular "Dragon Quest," but also study

applications, restaurant guides, dictionaries and other functions. Some primary schools in Japan now use it to teach English and Japanese kanji characters.

"Nintendo has always preserved the same philosophy: entertaining the family," said Hamamura. "But in 20 years the company has also expanded its range of games with educational titles, which has turned adults into players."

Nintendo president and CEO Satoru Iwata reportedly said recently that "it’s a grand vision to have every student at every school using a DS.

"It will take time and energy to reach that goal because the DS has been viewed by teachers as an enemy for a long time."

Videogamers Show Signs of Addictive Behavior

About one in 10 videogame players show signs of addictive behavior that could have negative effects on their family, friends and school work, according to a new study.

Researchers at Iowa State University (ISU) and the National Institute on Media and the Family found that some gamers show at least six symptoms of gambling addiction such as lying to family and friends about how much they play games, using the games to escape their problems and becoming restless or irritable when they stop playing.

They may also skip homework to play videogames or spend too much time playing the games and do poorly in school.

"While the medical community currently does not recognize video game addiction as a mental disorder, hopefully this study will be one of many that allow us to have an educated conversation on the positive and negative effects of video games," Dr Douglas Gentile, an assistant professor of psychology at ISU, said in a statement.

Dr David Walsh, the president of the National Institute on Media and the Family which strives to minimize the harm of media on the health and development of children and families, said the findings are a wake-up call for families.

"This study gives everyone a better idea of the scope of the problem," he explained.

The researchers, who studied 1,178 American children and teenagers, aged 8 to 18, found some displayed at least six of 11 symptoms of pathological gambling as defined by the American Psychiatric Association.

Addicted gamers played videogames 24 hours a week, twice as much as casual gamers. Some addicted gamers even steal to support their habit, according to the findings that will be published in the journal Psychological Science.

""While video games can be fun and entertaining, some kids are getting into trouble. I continue to hear from families who are concerned about their child’s gaming habits. Not only do we need to focus on identifying the problem, but we need to find ways to help families prevent and treat

it," said Walsh.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

After IBM Dalliance, Sun Goes to Oracle for $7.4 Billion

Sun Microsystems Inc.'s scramble to find a suitor landed the slumping server and software maker in the arms of Oracle Corp., which agreed to pay $7.4 billion in cash for Sun in a startling marriage that would transform Silicon Valley and the computing industry.

The acquisition announced Monday illustrates how some of the biggest and richest technology companies are racing to become one-stop shops for corporate and government customers. By picking up Sun and expanding heavily into hardware, Oracle would look much more like the company it beat out for Sun - IBM Corp., which appears unlikely to re-enter the bidding.

Heavyweights like IBM, Hewlett-Packard Co., Cisco Systems Inc. and now Oracle all want to offer a richer mix of technology products. The companies hope to find more hooks into customers and use those relationships to sell other kinds of stuff.

That setup, with a broad mix of services, software and hardware, helped Armonk, N.Y.-based IBM escape financial ruin in the 1990s and become one of the industry's most profitable companies. IBM has forked out nearly $13 billion on 40 acquisitions since 2006 to expand its offerings. HP has followed suit, spending $13.9 billion for services provider Electronic Data Systems last year.

Santa Clara, Calif.-based Sun lacked that kind of scale, especially after the tech meltdown of 2001 knocked the company off balance and led to a decade of financial pummeling.

Sun's best sellers are computer servers and machines that store data on tape. But Oracle and IBM mainly had their eyes on Sun's software.

The deal would give Oracle ownership of the Java programming language, which is a key element of the Internet and runs on more than 1 billion mobile devices worldwide. Oracle would get the Solaris operating system, which already has been a platform for Oracle's products. And Oracle would get Sun's MySQL database software, which has undercut Oracle and siphoned some sales away.

All these products are open-source, which means their underlying code is distributed freely on the Internet. To make money from the software, Sun sells support contracts alongside those programs. Like IBM before it, Oracle believes it can make money off those properties better than Sun can, partly by selling other products in package deals.

Forrester Research analyst Ray Wang thinks Oracle could keep MySQL to put pricing pressure on Microsoft, a longtime Oracle nemesis that sells a less expensive database product.

"With the acquisition of Sun, Oracle is now able to make all of the pieces of the technology stack fit together and work well," Oracle Chief Executive Larry Ellison said during a Monday conference call.

But unlike IBM, Oracle is a surprising suitor because it doesn't make hardware. Although Sun wouldn't be Oracle's biggest acquisition during a four-year shopping spree that has cost about $40 billion, it may be the boldest.

Some analysts suspect Oracle might try to sell Sun's hardware divisions if they turn out to be a drag.

"This is a really strange deal to me - Oracle buying all this hardware, I wonder what they're going to do with it all," said Jane Snorek, an analyst with First American Funds. "I don't know what to think, frankly. It seems everyone wants to be IBM and have a mix. If it wasn't the for the fact that Oracle is such a good acquirer, I'd be negative" about the deal.

Oracle shares sank 24 cents, 1.3 percent, to close at $18.82 in trading Monday. Sun shares jumped $2.46, 37 percent, to $9.15.

Oracle's offer - which is valued at $5.6 billion when Sun's cash and debt are taken into account - amounts to $9.50 per share. That represents a 42 percent premium to Sun's closing stock price of $6.69 on Friday, and is about twice what Sun was trading for in March, before word leaked that IBM and Sun were in negotiations.

While Sun wouldn't be Oracle's most expensive acquisition, it will be the largest in terms of the people involved. Sun employs about 33,500 workers, far more than the roughly 12,000 that PeopleSoft had when Oracle bought that company in 2005 for $11.1 billion - the biggest outlay during Oracle's expansion.

Oracle, which already has roughly 86,000 workers, didn't specify how many people will lose their jobs after it takes control of Sun. The cuts might not be as dramatic as they would have been in an IBM acquisition because Sun and Oracle have fewer overlapping products.

The smaller overlap also could keep Oracle from facing the antitrust objections that IBM likely would have prompted with Sun. Indeed, one of the sticking points in the IBM-Sun negotiations was the level of assurance Sun sought that IBM would see the deal through a regulatory review. Regulators figured to look closely at the way that swallowing Sun would expand IBM's lead over Hewlett-Packard in certain markets for servers and data storage.

Oracle already says the Sun acquisition, which it expects to close this summer, will add at least 15 cents per share to its adjusted earnings in the first year after the deal closes. The company estimated Sun will contribute more than $1.5 billion to Oracle's adjusted profit in the first year and more than $2 billion in the second year.

With former investment bankers Charles Phillips and Safra Catz steering things as the company's co-presidents, Oracle has been able to hit its

financial targets in all its acquisitions during the past four years.

That helped enable Oracle to earn $5.5 billion on revenue of $22.4 billion in its last fiscal year. Investors have enjoyed some of that prosperity too, with Oracle's stock rising about 35 percent since the PeopleSoft takeover was completed in 2005. Oracle recently decided to pay a dividend for the first time.

But Oracle's emphasis on increasing profits will likely raise concerns in its new role as the steward of Sun's open-source software.

"This gives Oracle the keys to the crown jewels of the open-source movement," said Wang, the Forrester analyst.

Ellison said Oracle intends to invest more heavily in Java than Sun has been able to afford as its fortunes waned. While Sun still has big sales - $13.9 billion last year - its profitability has been hit and miss. Earnings last year were $403 million, but from 2002 through 2006 Sun lost more than $5 billion.

The Sun-backed free OpenOffice software for word processing and spreadsheets also could be used to weaken Microsoft's franchise - an objective that would delight Ellison, who, like Sun co-founder and Chairman Scott McNealy, has long sought to undermine Microsoft's dominance of the computing industry.

Microsoft said it didn't have specific comments on the Oracle-Sun deal, though Neil Charney, general manager of a software-development unit at Microsoft, suggested that customers "ask themselves if this will add more complexity and cost" to Oracle and Sun's products.

Oracle's takeover came together in just days. Sun and CEO Jonathan Schwartz needed a deal fast after IBM withdrew its offer this month in a dispute over the terms of a buyout, and on Thursday, Sun reached out to Oracle, according to people familiar with the negotiations. That prompted IBM to put its previous offer of $9.40 per share back on the table, but Oracle swooped in with the higher price, these people said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the details of the talks were considered confidential.

A person familiar with IBM's position said the company isn't likely to rebid for Sun. IBM's chief financial officer, Mark Loughridge, even threw some competitive dirt on the deal during IBM's earnings conference call Monday.

"Oracle and Sun have been partnering for two decades - and what's the result?" Loughridge said. "As I look at this and ask myself, 'What's really changed,' I think, 'nothing.'"

Microsoft Still Sees Potential in Yahoo Partnership

U.S. software company Microsoft still sees value in a potential partnership with Yahoo even though it is no longer wants to buy it, chief executive Steve Ballmer said on Friday.

"I have said many times that we no longer are interested in acquiring Yahoo, but we'd see the potential to create real value by partnering

with Yahoo," he said at an industry event in Germany.

"I have said many times that when the time is right I'm sure we will have such discussions and I've said many times I'm not going to tell you when the time is right."

Technology blog All Things Digital reported this month the chief executives of Microsoft and Yahoo had met to discuss potential partnerships between the companies' Internet search and advertising operations. At the time, both companies declined to comment on the report.

Earlier this week, Ballmer said Microsoft was not interested in buying a hardware company following Oracle Corp's proposed takeover of Sun Microsystems.

Ballmer, speaking a day after Microsoft said third-quarter profit fell 32 percent, said integrating those two companies would be "very tough" given "a lot of overlap."

US Adviser Says Cybersecurity Must Be Joint Effort

The challenge of protecting the government's computer networks is too big for any one agency to handle alone, a top adviser to President Barack Obama said Wednesday. That suggests the administration doesn't intend to consolidate control of U.S. cybersecurity under a single department like the National Security Agency, as some have feared.

The comments by Melissa Hathaway, in her first public appearance since completing a still-secret 60-day study on the nation's computer security, were light on details but offered some hints on how the administration plans to address the turf wars and confusion surrounding the country's patchwork cybersecurity policies.

Hathaway didn't offer any specifics about her findings or proposals in her talk at the RSA security conference in San Francisco. She said those will be released in the "coming days" after the administration reviews her report.

The fragility of the world's digital infrastructure is "one of the most serious economic and national security challenges of the 21st century," Hathaway said, and the responsibility for locking down networks in the U.S. "transcends the jurisdictional purview of individual departments and agencies."

"Although each agency has a unique contribution to make, no single agency has a broad enough perspective to match the sweep of the challenges," she added.

Hackers, identity thieves and spies are stepping up their attacks on the nation's power grids, military networks and other government networks loaded with sensitive data, as evidenced by the number of break-ins that have come to light in recent months. Meanwhile, the administration has struggled with how to organize the nation's cyberspace programs.

In a sign of the turmoil, the head of the nation's cybersecurity center - Rod Beckstrom - resigned in March, blaming a shortage of money and a clash over whether the NSA should control cyber efforts. Suggestions

from intelligence officials that the NSA should coordinate the country's overall cybersecurity effort have triggered protests over whether it's appropriate to give such control to spy agencies.

NSA director Keith Alexander, also speaking at the security conference, said the NSA wants to be inclusive.

"We do not want to run cyber security for the U.S. government," he said. "That's a big job. It's going to take a team to do it."

The Pentagon is planning to reorganize its military efforts on cyber issues and create a new military command to focus on protecting it computer networks, U.S. officials told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Conficker Virus Begins To Attack PCs

A malicious software program known as Conficker that many feared would wreak havoc on April 1 is slowly being activated, weeks after being dismissed as a false alarm, security experts said.

Conficker, also known as Downadup or Kido, is quietly turning thousands of personal computers into servers of e-mail spam and installing spyware, they said.

The worm started spreading late last year, infecting millions of computers and turning them into "slaves" that respond to commands sent from a remote server that effectively controls an army of computers known as a botnet.

Its unidentified creators started using those machines for criminal purposes in recent weeks by loading more malicious software onto a small percentage of computers under their control, said Vincent Weafer, a vice president with Symantec Security Response, the research arm of the world's largest security software maker, Symantec Corp.

"Expect this to be long-term, slowly changing," he said of the worm. "It's not going to be fast, aggressive."

Conficker installs a second virus, known as Waledac, that sends out e-mail spam without knowledge of the PC's owner, along with a fake anti-spyware program, Weafer said.

The Waledac virus recruits the PCs into a second botnet that has existed for several years and specializes in distributing e-mail spam.

"This is probably one of the most sophisticated botnets on the planet. The guys behind this are very professional. They absolutely know what they are doing," said Paul Ferguson, a senior researcher with Trend Micro Inc, the world's third-largest security software maker.

He said Conficker's authors likely installed a spam engine and another malicious software program on tens of thousands of computers since April 7.

He said the worm will stop distributing the software on infected PCs on May 3 but more attacks will likely follow.

"We expect to see a different component or a whole new twist to the way this botnet does business," said Ferguson, a member of The Conficker Working Group, an international alliance of companies fighting the worm.

Researchers had feared the network controlled by the Conficker worm might be deployed on April 1 since the worm surfaced last year because it was programed to increase communication attempts from that date.

The security industry formed the task force to fight the worm, bringing widespread attention that experts said probably scared off the criminals who command the slave computers.

The task force initially thwarted the worm using the Internet's traffic control system to block access to servers that control the slave computers.

Viruses that turn PCs into slaves exploit weaknesses in Microsoft's Windows operating system. The Conficker worm is especially tricky because it can evade corporate firewalls by passing from an infected machine onto a USB memory stick, then onto another PC.

The Conficker botnet is one of many such networks controlled by syndicates that authorities believe are based in eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, China and Latin America.

New Mikeyy Worm Plagues Twitter via E-Cards

After a fifth iteration of the Mikeyy virus hit Twitter on Friday, the micro-blogging site was busy cleaning up a phishing scam this weekend that stole personal information through an e-card Web site.

"Please make sure you do not visit any site calling itself TheSmartECard.com; it appears to be a phishing site," according to a post on the Twitter spam feed earlier this morning. "TheSmartECard.com isn't a virus; it's just a scam/phishing site. Don't go to it, don't give it your personal
info."

Twitter later warned users not to visit Twaniac.com as well, "as they're from the people behind TheSmartECard.com."

Some users who inadvertently visited the phishing site had their accounts suspended. Twitter advised people in this situation to file a help ticket, and they would reinstate your account.

In addition to the phishing scam, Twitter itself was rather slow this weekend, a problem co-founder Evan Williams insisted was not related to Oprah Winfrey joining the site.

"To those asking: site slowness today had nothing to do with @Oprah," Williams wrote on Sunday. "That had a huge effect Friday, but team kept it under control."

The talk show host had Williams on her show Friday afternoon, along with actor and Twitter fan Ashton Kutcher, who beat CNN's breaking news feed last week to be the first person to reach 1 million followers.

As the Oprah news was breaking, a new variant of the Mikeyy worm appeared on the site - posting celebrity-related messages on peoples' feeds without their permission. The worm first appeared about a week ago, and a 17-year-old high school student from Brooklyn named Michael Mooney claimed responsibility for it.

By Friday evening, Twitter said it had things under control with the Mikeyy variant.

Security firm Sophos said the latest snafu made Twitter look unprofessional.

"Once again, Twitter is left looking amateurish in its response as it clearly hasn't properly hardened its systems from these kind of cross-site scripting attacks," Sophos security expert Graham Cluley wrote in a blog post.

"Until they get their act together, users need to remember to turn off scripting (the combination of Firefox and NoScript is a good one) if viewing users' profiles."

An individual claiming to be Mooney responded to questions from PCMag.com via e-mail last week, but e-mails to his address on Friday bounced back. Mooney said he hoped his work on the Mikeyy worm would lead to job offers, and that exqSoft Solutions apparently took the bait.

The company reportedly offered Mikeyy a job, but as Cluley points out in a separate Twitter posts from exqSoft's CEO suggest that the move is more about drumming up publicity for exqSoft than hiring a talented teenager.

"ExqSoft Solutions are in effect encouraging other youngsters to behave like irresponsible idiots," Cluley wrote. "The last thing we want is a wave of other kids exploiting software and websites, in the hope that they might be rewarded with a job offer."

AVG Unveils LinkScanner to Fight Malware on the Web

AVG Technologies has released AVG LinkScanner, now a separate product.

It's been known for years that the web is the distribution mechanism for the large majority of malware. While e-mail is still heavily used to lure users, the e-mail contains links to the web, not attached malware.

LinkScanner pre-screens web sites as you surf, looking for malicious activity. Competitive systems based either on reputation or asynchronous scanning simply can't keep up with the massive volume and turnover of malicious web sites. These systems, like McAfee's SiteAdvisor as well as the reputation systems built into the latest versions of everyone's browser are far from perfect, but their use provides some defense-in-depth that can't hurt.

LinkScanner isn't perfect either, but AVG claims a far higher percentage of detection than the reputation systems can possibly claim, and their argument makes sense: The people who make these malicious sites aren't especially creative and they tend to use the same techniques over and over again, especially once they get the notion that one of them is working. So while a reputation system can't keep up with thousands of

new, but essentially identical malicious sites, a synchronous scanning system can detect a high percentage of them.

While it is now unbundled from their other offerings, the LinkScanner functions are also built into their more fully featured products. The separate LinkScanner can coexist with other anti-malware products.

Yahoo! Abandoning GeoCities

Yahoo! said Thursday it will close its GeoCities service that provides people a free online locale for home pages.

The announcement comes two days after the struggling Internet pioneer posted lackluster earnings and its newly enthroned chief executive assured investors that the company is focusing its resources on core strengths.

"We will be closing GeoCities later this year," Yahoo! said in an email response to an AFP inquiry.

"As part of Yahoo!’s ongoing effort to build products and services that deliver the best possible experiences for consumers and results for advertisers, we are increasing investment in some areas while scaling back in others."

GeoCities is a web hosting service founded in 1994 as Beverly Hills Internet and bought by Yahoo! for more than three billion dollars during the height of the infamous dot-com boom in Silicon Valley.

GeoCities provided people with tools to build interactive websites and eventually added chat forums and other community-oriented features. A notice at GeoCities on Thursday said it is no longer accepting new accounts.

Yahoo! added fee premium services in an effort to make money at GeoCities, which had trouble retaining users and getting profitable.

GeoCities joins a list of recently discontinued Yahoo! services including Farechase, My Web, Audio Search, Pets, Live, Kickstart, Briefcase and Yahoo! for Teachers, according to the Sunnyvale, California-based firm.

Computer Users Applaud Macs, Give Dell Low Marks

A new report from Forrester Research demonstrates that Dell has a long way to go to regain the full approval of American computer users.

As part of a survey of nearly 4,600 consumers in the United States about their interactions with a variety of companies, Forrester Research examined the scores of the five largest computer manufacturers: Apple, Compaq, Dell, Gateway and Hewlett-Packard. When it comes to three key performance criteria - usefulness, enjoyability and ease of use - Apple led the pack, noted Bruce Temkin, a principal analyst and vice president at Forrester.

"Apple’s rating of 80 percent was 14 points higher than that of the next firm on the list, Gateway," Temkin said. By contrast, Dell ended up with "the lowest score and was one of three firms with an overall ’poor’ rating."

One obvious reason why Apple’s machines likely did better than their PC rivals is that many consumers appear to find the Mac operating system more user-friendly than Windows. So Microsoft’s launch of a more user-friendly Windows 7 in the months ahead could help boost the fortunes of PC makers over the long haul.

"The OS absolutely plays a role in how consumers rate their experience with the computer manufacturers," Temkin said. "But the hardware companies control a lot of the experience as well -- from how they configure the software to how they sell the systems to how they support them after the sale."

Gateway, HP and Compaq were able to achieve similar scores across all three of Forrester’s key performance criteria, where Dell wound up with significantly lower ratings than its rivals in the areas of being easy to use and enjoyable - and that’s bad news for Dell.

"The analysis did not examine the underlying causes of the low scores," Temkin said. "Clearly, Dell’s problems with consumers go beyond the OS."

Forrester’s survey shows that good customer experiences correlate with customer loyalty for computer manufacturers, Temkin said. "While customer experience is important for PC makers to cultivate loyal customers, they aren’t doing a very good job," he added.

Overall, the top five computer makers received a "poor" rating for their customer experience, Temkin noted. As a group, they came in ahead of only ISPs, TV service providers, and health plans, he said. Given that the economic downturn is compelling many consumers to cut back on their purchases, now is not the time for computer makers to cut back on their delivery of a good customer experience.

"Companies have to decide if they think good customer experience is a luxury or a necessity," Temkin said. "If it’s the former, then the PC makers will likely accelerate their long-term decline. If it’s the later, then the PC makers will need to find places to cut expenses that don’t negatively impact the experiences of their key customers."

Moreover, vendors must incorporate the voice of the customer by immediately addressing five levels of activities: Relationship tracking, interaction monitoring, continuous listening, periodic immersion, and project infusion, Temkin explained. "Above all, they must not give customers a reason to regret their purchase and share those thoughts with their friends."

Computer makers such as Dell won’t be able to improve customer experience overnight, Temkin noted, but they can adopt three principles to boost their ratings in the long run. "Obsess about customer needs, not product features; reinforce brands with every interaction, not just communications; and treat customer experience as a competence, not a function," Temkin advised.

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